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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 001821

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, ISN. JOINT STAFF FOR J5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2034

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SUBJECT: 2009 U.S.-CHINA DEFENSE CONSULTATIVE TALKS (DCT),
SESSION 1: MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS

Classified By: Classified by ADCM William Weinstein. Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) During the first session of the 10th U.S.-PRC Defense Consultative Talks (DCT) held June 23-24 2009 in Beijing, both the U.S. and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) delegations affirmed that presidents of the two countries had charged them with improving the military-to-military relationship. Beyond that, the PLA delegation focused on obstacles to improving the relationship while the U.S. delegation sought to identify areas of common interest and opportunities for further cooperation. The two sides discussed guiding principles for the military-to-military relationship, and listed several high-level exchanges to pursue in the remainder of 2009. End Summary.

PLA Perspectives on the Military-to-Military Relationship

¶2. (C) Lieutenant General Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff led off the first session, noting that Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP) Michele Flournoy's visit marked the 10th round of Defense Consultative Talks (DCT) between the two defense establishments and the first to be held under the Obama Administration. He remarked that the thirty years of military-to-military relations had experienced "twists and turns" and promised that the two sides would have a "frank and pragmatic" exchange of views. He expressed hope that through joint efforts China and the United States would be able to push the bilateral relationship forward.

¶3. (C) USDP expressed hope that the two sides would be able to explore how defense relations could contribute to the overall goal of building a positive, cooperative and comprehensive bilateral relationship as President Barack Obama and President Hu Jintao discussed during their April meeting in London. President Obama wants to chart a "new course" in relations, she assured LTG Ma. She noted that recent military contacts between the two sides have already led to significant developments, and the meeting between LTG Ma and Secretary Gates at the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore have helped to increase understanding. Acknowledging that military-to-military ties have indeed experienced ups and downs, USDP noted that the purpose of the ongoing round of talks was to set relations on the right course. Although it was natural to disagree, she assured LTG Ma that President Obama wants to build a broader strategic relationship in which the two sides can overcome difficulties.

The Taiwan Issue and Military-to-Military Relations

¶4. (C) LTG Ma acknowledged that the U.S. sometimes complains that the PRC always raises the topic of Taiwan in bilateral dialogues, adding that he finds the U.S. recitation of its one China policy based on the Three Joint Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act to be the more tiresome response. He urged the U.S. delegation to listen "patiently and carefully" to his presentation that they might "hear something new." He then proceeded to recite standard talking points on Taiwan: the Taiwan issue remained the central issue of U.S.-China relations and is inseparable from military-to-military ties.

Both sides agreed that the defense relationship lags behind other aspects of the overall bilateral relationship and that it is often caught in a vicious cycle of "progress and suspension." To LTG Ma, the root cause of this problem is the Taiwan issue, particularly U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. As evidence, he noted that all suspensions in military-to-military ties, except those following the Belgrade Embassy bombing in 1999 and the EP-3 incident in 2001, occurred as a result of Taiwan arms sales.

¶5. (C) Despite recent improvements in cross-Straits relations, the Taiwan issue remained China's "core interest" and its "most important security issue," LTG Ma declared. Therefore, China can not be silent on U.S. arms sales and is forced to make a strong reaction. China has "serious concern" over reports that the U.S. was contemplating selling F-16 C/D fighters to Taiwan, LTG Ma warned. He also remarked that it is "difficult to understand" how the U.S. was considering selling Blackhawk helicopters to Taiwan when it refused even to provide spare parts for Blackhawks sold to China in the 1980s after China requested such parts following the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province. Further U.S. arms sales to Taiwan would undermine the "historic change" in cross-Straits relations, inflate the arrogance of supporters of Taiwan independence, and disrupt the overall relationship, LTG Ma warned. He urged the U.S. to "properly handle" the Taiwan issue and "break the cycle" of starts and stops in military-to-military relations.

¶6. (C) LTG Ma also complained about high-level U.S.-Taiwan military contacts, alleging that U.S.-Taiwan military ties were closer than those between the U.S. and China. Taiwan's "so called" Defense Minister or Vice Defense Minister visits the United States each year to attend the U.S. Defense Industries Conference to discuss arms sales, LTG Ma noted, and he claimed that the United States was providing help in developing Taiwan's C4ISR system. Taiwan's de facto military attaché received better reception in the Pentagon than MG Zhao, LTG Ma complained. He then pointed to recent reports alleging that U.S. Marines will provide security for the new American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) building in Taiwan and that Taiwan Military Police will guard Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) offices in Washington.

All of those actions, according to LTG Ma, were designed to increase Taiwan's capability to resist unification by force and encourage Taiwan independence. Warming to his subject, LTG Ma suggested that the U.S. criticized China's military relations with sovereign states such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, but disregarded China's opposition to U.S. military ties with Taiwan.

¶7. (C) LTG Ma pointed to the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies' (APCSSL) practice of "alternating" invitations to the mainland and Taiwan to attend its courses as another obstacle for improving the U.S.-PRC military-to-military relationship.

LTG Ma took great offense at the suggestion that since India and Pakistan attend APCSSL courses together, so perhaps China and Taiwan should "set aside disputes" and do the same. LTG Ma suggested that such a parallel was "absurd" and showed "a lack of common sense" since India and Pakistan are sovereign nations while Taiwan is an integral part of China. The Center's actions appeared to LTG Ma as designed to create "one China, one Taiwan," something China can never accept.

U.S. Welcomes Relaxation of Tensions

¶8. (C) USDP responded to LTG Ma's lengthy presentation by stressing that the United States very much welcomes the relaxation of tensions across the Taiwan Strait. She commented that the United States and China have both helped to reduce those tensions. The United States maintains its one China policy based on the three joint communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act. She made clear that the United States does not support Taiwan independence and remains opposed to unilateral action to change the status quo by either side. Washington hopes for a peaceful resolution that is acceptable to the people of both sides of the Strait. The United States will continue to make articles available for Taiwan's self defense, USDP affirmed, but for now the new administration is reviewing proposals in the normal process and has not yet made a decision.

¶9. (C) USDP commented that the Taiwan issue will take a long time to resolve and it is unreasonable to hold U.S.-China military-to-military relations hostage in the meantime. As for LTG Ma's allegation about the closeness of U.S.-Taiwan military ties, USDP said that there is simply "no comparison" between the high level military contacts between China and the U.S. and the minimal contacts between the U.S. and Taiwan militaries. Responding to LTG Ma's complaints about APCSS, USDP took note of China's sensitivity but clarified that APCSS invites the PRC to every high-level course. She assured LTG Ma that the U.S. delegation registered China's concerns regarding Taiwan. David Shear, State Department Director for China and Mongolia Affairs, added that no decision has been made regarding security arrangements for the new AIT building.

Guiding Principles for the Military Relationship

¶10. (C) Turning to the next item on the agenda, LTG Ma stressed the importance of establishing guiding principles for military-to-military ties to help each side better understand the other's goals for the relationship. He commented that the traditional definition of "allies or enemies" is not appropriate for describing the relationship. China does not see any other country as a threat or an adversary and does not look to create enemies. China does not threaten others, but neither does it want to be contained by others, LTG Ma maintained. Nevertheless, China is not nave and does not have terribly high hopes or expectations for military ties, owing to different political systems. Recalling the "honeymoon" period of the 1980s when the two sides collaborated against the Soviet Union and the U.S. sold China Blackhawk helicopters and F-8 upgrades, LTG Ma commented that "friendship is temporary, but interests are permanent." The U.S. and China share many interests, including trade, climate change, nonproliferation, counterterrorism, and humanitarian relief, LTG Ma observed. These common interests can be the foundation for the defense relationship. LTG Ma reviewed the four principles the PLA had previously proposed to guide the relationship: mutual respect, mutual trust, reciprocity, and mutual benefit, and asked if the U.S. had a response to his proposal.

¶11. (C) USDP agreed that common interests should anchor the military relationship and that the two sides could benefit from a discussion of guiding principles for that relationship. She deferred to Michael Schiffer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for East Asia, to address the PLA's proposal. DASD Schiffer expressed appreciation for LTG Ma's comments, noting that there was a lot of common ground and that the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit are consistent with the U.S. position. DASD Schiffer noted that the two countries also shared the goal of establishing mutual respect and mutual trust, cautioning that both must make certain that they are using the terms in the same way.

¶12. (C) DASD Schiffer then proposed two additional principles. The first was continuous dialogue to ensure uninterrupted communication between the two militaries. The

second principle was mutual risk reduction, building on the Defense Telephone Link and the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) to reduce the potential for miscalculation or misunderstanding. DASD Schiffer then proposed establishing a working group to discuss these principles and allow the two sides to more fully understand each other. DASD Schiffer admitted that results could not be guaranteed, but the two sides could seek to reach consensus by the fall in time for planned high-level meetings.

¶13. (C) LTG Ma expressed appreciation for the U.S. response, noting that the U.S. had in 2003 proposed the principles of equality, transparency, and consistency as appropriate for guiding the military relationship. He agreed in principle to commissioning a working group, but said that there should be no deadline for progress because reaching an agreement might take some time. He acknowledged that there would be differences in how to interpret the principles, but appreciated the U.S. side's taking his proposal seriously.

¶14. (C) LTG Ma rhetorically asked "what is wrong with respect," arguing that it connotes a two way street in which neither side is dominant. He then launched into a lengthy complaint about the treatment of PLA delegations at airport security checks in the United States, adding that he was convinced that this was a political rather than a technical issue. USDP assured LTG Ma that the problem was poor communication between the Defense Department and the Department of Homeland Security, and that dignitaries from other countries had encountered similar problems. LTG Ma replied that to his knowledge, the only other dignitaries that had difficulties were from the Middle East and South Asia. He sarcastically remarked that perhaps China was in a "special category" with North Korea, Iraq, Iran, the Taliban, and Bin Laden. "We are guests of the Defense Department, not terrorists," LTG Ma observed, adding that if such incidents continued to happen, he would have to limit the number of PLA visitors to the United States.

¶15. (C) LTG Ma further noted that reciprocity is an international principle that China did not create but by which it is willing to abide. However, the twelve restrictions in Section 1201 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 (NDAA 2000) makes it difficult for the PLA to be open with the U.S. Noting the differences in political systems, he commented that the National People's Congress would not pass similar legislation against the United States. He insisted that the PLA has made "huge efforts" to be transparent to the United States, including by allowing the U.S. to send the first foreign delegation to visit the headquarters of the PLA Second Artillery and the Command and Control Center of the Nanjing Military Region.

Proposed High Level Military Contacts for 2009

¶16. (C) Brigadier General Joseph Callahan, Joint Staff Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs - Asia, wrapped up the first session by outlining the U.S. proposal for high level exchanges for the rest of the year. These include Central Military Commission Vice Chairman General Xu Caihou's visit to the U.S. in late October or early November, Chief of the PLA General Staff General Chen Bingde's visit to the U.S. in October, the USPACOM Commander's visit to China in late July, PACFLEET Air Force Commander's visit to China in the summer, U.S. Army Chief of Staff's visit to China in August, PLA Navy Commander Admiral Wu's visit to the U.S. in October, PLA Air Force Commander General Xu's visit to the U.S. in October, the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff's visit to China in November, and the Marine Forces Pacific Commander's visit to China in July or September.

¶17. (C) USDP added that it would also be appropriate to have a PLA representative attend the Strategic and Economic Dialogue in Washington in late July. Responding to the overall list, LTG Ma said that because of preparations for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic

of China and of the PLA Air Force, it would be difficult to carry out so many visits to the United States. Nonetheless, he noted that General Xu's visit was "very important" and would go forward. He also welcomed the U.S. Army Chief, USPACOM Commander and the U.S. Air Force Chief to visit China, and said China hopes that Secretary Gates and Chairman Mullen would visit in 2009. He also offered that Jinan Military Region Commander General Pan would be able to visit the United States this year. LTG Ma concluded by noting that China holds a positive attitude toward high level military visits and is willing to continue discussions on the matter.

18. (U) U.S. Participants:

Michele Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP)
Dan Piccuta, Charge d'Affaires
Michael Schiffer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(DASD) for East Asia
David Shear, EAP/CM, Department of State
Brig Gen Joseph Callahan, Deputy Director for
Politico-Military Affairs - Asia, Joint Staff J5
Brig Gen William Uhle, USPACOM Deputy J5
RDML Bradley Gerhrke, U.S. Defense Attach in Beijing
John Plumb, OSD Principal Director for Nuclear and Missile
Defense Policy
Craig Mullaney, OSD Principal Director for Central Asia
Robert Gromoll Acting Director for Regional Affairs ISN,
Department of State

19. (U) PRC Participants

Lieutenant General Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of the PLA
General Staff
Major General Qian Lihua, Director, Ministry of National
Defense Foreign Affairs Office (MND/FAO)
Major General Yang Hui, Director, Intelligence Department,
PLA General Staff Department
Rear Admiral Yi Changzhi, Deputy Chief of Staff, PLA Navy
Major General Zhu Chenghu, Director, Department of
International Strategic Studies, PLA National Defense
University (NDU)
Senior Captain Guan Youfei, Deputy Director, MND/FAO
Senior Colonel Wang Kebin, Deputy Director, Operations
Department, PLA General Staff Department
Major General Zhao Ning, PRC Defense Attache in Washington
Senior Captain Li Ji, Director, North American and Oceania
Bureau, MND/FAO
Councilor Ma Zhanwu, North American and Oceania Affairs, MFA
Lieutenant Colonel Chu Weiwei, Interpreter, MND/FAO

20. (U) USDP has cleared this cable.

GOLDBERG